

L I V E S

OF THE MOST EMINENT

Magicians, Astrologers, Conjurers, &c.

LIFE OF MERLIN,

THE BRITISH PROPHET AND MAGICIAN.

THE most ancient chronologers have not identified who was the father of this wonderful man, nor is it ascertained whether he were actually begotten according to the course of nature by a man and a woman, or, according to his mother's confession, conceived by the conjunction of a spiritual being. The latter, however, seems to be a deception made use of by the mother for the purpose of concealing or excusing her own want of chastity, as she was the daughter of King Demetrius, and of course a royal virgin. With respect to the religion of Merlin, it is scarcely to be doubted that he was a Christian, as the kingdom had for the space of two hundred years before his birth been converted to Christianity under King Lucius; but, by what spirit he prophesied, is only known to the Father of Spirits, who selected him to foretell the events which should happen to posterity. Merlin was born in the reign of King Vortigern, who obtained the British crown by usurpation; from which he was deposed, after reigning sixteen years, in favour of his eldest son Vortimer; but, he not long after being imprisoned by his step-mother Rowena, Vortigern was restored to the kingdom. He was afterwards overcome by the treachery of Hengist, and fled into Wales; where, thinking to fortify himself, he began to lay the founda-

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tions of a castle upon a hill called Cloaricus. The ground had been marked out, and the stones deposited in the area to proceed in building, when they suddenly sunk down, and wholly disappeared. As there appeared to be no swampy ground or hollow soil near the site chosen for the castle, it created a great consternation both in the king and the workmen. The mystery was inexplicable; and the king, having ordered the builders to proceed no farther in the work, sent to all the bards and wizards (of which that age produced plenty) to know the reason of the prodigy, or at least what it portended. They at length met; and, after a long consultation, in which they were wholly unable to develop the cause, they agreed to answer the king by giving him such a one that should leave the mystery in the same darkness they had found it. When his majesty came, he was told, in a solemn manner, that the stones could never be laid together nor the place built upon till they were cemented with the blood of a male child, who was born of a mother but had no father. The king being satisfied with this answer, the soothsayers departed, happy that they had put their master off with such an evasion, and saved their own credit. This conduct, however, should not be considered as any dispraise to the art of divination and prophecy, because they were merely pretenders; and supported their influence over the mind by impudence and imposition. The king, having called his servants about him, commanded them to search through all provinces and countries till they could find such a one as the wise men had spoken of, and bring the party before him either by persuasion or force, without informing them of the cause. One of the messengers happened to arrive at a town or city called Kaier-Merlin, which implies Merlin's town or borough, the same which at present is called Marlborough. At the gates, the messenger was compelled to stop for entrance; and, during this short interval, some lads were sporting, two of whom fell out; one young Merlin, and the other Dinabutius, who upbraided his play-fellow with being worse than a bastard, as he was begotten without

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any father. The messenger then demanded who he was and what were his parents, and received an answer that his father was no where to be found, but his mother was in the Nunnery of St. Peter, and had taken the vows. The intelligence induced the gentleman to repair to the chief-magistrate, to whom he shewed his commission; and an order was immediately granted for the mother and son to be delivered to his care, and conducted to his majesty. The king was exceedingly glad when they were brought before him; and the first question he asked the woman was if that was her natural son, and was answered in the affirmative. The king then desired to know by what father he was begotten; and the nun replied, that she never had communication with any being in human or mortal shape; but that a spirit, assuming the form of a beautiful young man, had many times appeared to her, seeming to court her with uncommon warmth and affection; he immediately vanished upon the appearance of any of the nuns, and constantly returned when there was no obstruction to his visits. Being at last overcome by his earnest entreaties, she yielded to the gratification of his passion; and, when the full time of her pregnancy had expired, she was delivered of the son now in his presence, whom she caused to be named MERLIN.

The whole speech was spoke with much modesty; and, when the strictness of her order was considered, and that she was of royal birth, the king had no doubt of the authenticity of what he had heard related. The mild and engaging countenance of young Merlin so much interested King Vortigern in his favour, that he thought it was a pity his blood should be mingled with the dust of the earth. Having observed the traits of great penetration and austerity in his features, the king, instead of sentencing him to death, and ordering him to be slain, unfolded to him the mystery which attended the laying the foundation of the castle, and the strange impediments that had delayed the work. He also informed him of the assembly of the bards and wizards; but bid Merlin be assured, that he valued his life above the erection of ten such castles as his

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blood was to have formed the cement of. To which words, Merlin, who had, all this while stood silent, and spoke not a word, thus replied, " Royal sir, blind were your bards, witless your wizards, and silly and simple your soothsayers, who shewed themselves averse to art, and altogether unacquainted with the secrets of nature, as altogether ignorant that in the breast of this hill lies a vast moat, or deep pool, which hath ingurgitated and swallowed all these materials thrown into the trenches. Therefore, command them to be digged deeper, and you shall discover the water in which your squared stones have been washed, and in the bottom of the lake you shall find two hollow rocks of stone, and in them two horrible dragons fast sleeping." At the conclusion of this speech, the king signified his approbation, and immediately commanded pioners, with all the necessary utensils for digging, to be employed in penetrating deeply into the ground, where the pond was found, and from which the water was drained: hence, the bottom being left dry, the two hollow rocks were discovered; and, on their being opened, two fierce and dreadful dragons rushed out, the one red, and the other white, and commenced a violent and terrible conflict. The red dragon was, however, finally vanquished by the white; the king beheld this supernatural appearance and extraordinary conflict with amazement; and, when it was over, demanded of Merlin what it all portended. Merlin, with a deep sigh and tearful eyes, in the spirit of prophecy, made him this answer, being his first prediction:

Woe's me for the red dragon, for, alack!
The time is come, he hasteth to his mach.
The bloody serpent (yet whose souls are white)
Implies that nation, on which thy delight
Was late sole fix'd; (the SAXONS), who as friends
Came to thee first, but aiming at shrewd ends.
They shall have power over the drooping red,
In which the British nation's figured.
Drive shall he them into caves, holes, and dens,
To barren mountains, and to moorish fens,

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Hills shall remove to where the valleys stood,
And all the baths and brooks shall flow with blood.
The worship of the Holy God shall cease ;
For, in thilk days, the kirk shall have no peace.
The Panims (woe the while !) shall get the day,
And with their idols mawmety bear sway.
And yet, in fine, she that was so oppress'd
Shall mount, and in the high rocks build her nest.
For, out of Cornwall shall proceed a Bore,
Who shall the kirk to pristine state restore.
Bow shall all Britain to his kingly beck,
And tread he shall on the white dragon's neck.

Then casting a sad look upon the king, as if reading his fate in his forehead, he muttered to himself and said,

But well-away for thee, to Britain dear,
For I foresee thy sad disaster's near.

Within a few years after the whole of this prophecy was completely fulfilled ; for, Vortigern, having built and fortified his castle, the two sons of Constantine, whom Vortigern had before caused to be slain, assisted by their kinsman, Pudentius, king of Arinorica, or Little Britain, passed the sea, with a complete army, and landed at Totness. They were then joined by many of the Britons, under Ambrosius Aurelius and Uter-Pendragon, who made their speedy expedition towards Wales, to attack Vortigern, the usurper. The fury of the assailants proved unequal to the walls, upon which they cast balls of fire into the fortifications, and the whole building was soon in flames. Thus did Vortigern die a miserable death, having reigned nine years after his last inauguration. By the white and red dragons were figured the British and Saxon people, between whom many and dreadful battles were fought ; insomuch that the poor Britons, whether courtiers or cottagers, were obliged to take their abode, occasionally, among the hills and rocks. The Saxons, when they first came into the land, endeavoured to sup-

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caused the great stones which stand on the plain of Salisbury, to be brought in a whirlwind, one night, out of Ireland, and placed them where they now stand, in remembrance of the British lords slain there in battle with the Saxons.

Before entering into the events, which prove that the spirit of prediction in Merlin was unrivalled and almost unexampled, we shall detail one more instance of the power he possessed in the art of metamorphosis. To Aurelius Ambrose succeeded his brother, Uter-Pendragon, who gained many signal victories over the Saxons; and, having taken Octa, the son of Hengist, and Cosa, his nephew, prisoners, he gave a great entertainment at the feast of Easter, to which he invited all his nobility and gentry, with their wives and daughters. Among the rest of his peers, was then present Gothlois, duke of Cornwall, with his lady, the most beautiful Igerna, who was held to be the most charming woman in England. Such were her person and behaviour, that the king became deeply enamoured of her; and, unable to repress his passion, he even embraced her in the presence of her husband, who was immediately fired with jealousy; and, without taking leave of the king or the rest of his fellow peers, rose from table, and ordered his wife to follow. Deaf to all persuasion, he carried her into the country, which so much irritated the king, that he sent for them back, pretending that he had immediate need of his assistance in council. The duke, however, set more value upon his lady than the king's command, and returned a peremptory answer that he would not come. This message increased the king's anger, who in reply informed him that, if he persisted in his obstinacy, he would beat his towers and turrets about his ears; but even this royal menace produced no better effect than the former, and the king was set at public defiance. To chastise this refractory nobleman, Uter-Pendragon gathered a strong army, and invaded his country with fire and sword. Gothlois, perceiving he was unable to oppose the king in the field, withdrew to a stong castle, then called Dime-
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Loch, and there fortified himself, daily expecting forces from Ireland; but, provident for the future security of his wife, he sent her to an impregnable fort called Tindagol, which was surrounded by the sea, all but one narrow pass leading to it. The king, having passed a few days in besieging the former castle, grew more violent in his love for the lady, insomuch that he was incapable of doing any thing but thinking on her. At length he complained of the flame which consumed him to an intimate friend named Ursin, of Ricaradoch, who very sincerely gave his opinion that there appeared but little prospect of his royal master obtaining the lady, since the fort, in which she resided, was inaccessible from its natural and artificial strength, and the passage to it might be defended by three men against his whole army. One refuge only, he said, remained, and that lay in the prophet Merlin, who could accomplish the business when every other means failed. The king immediately ordered Merlin to be sent for, and told him the violence of his passion for the countess; without the enjoyment of whom, he was not able to exist. Merlin, who saw with much concern the pale countenance of his majesty, and heard the deep sighs which issued from his breast, replied that he could only effect what he desired by the power of magic, and some of those rare secrets, none but himself possessed; that by certain unctions and medicaments, prepared according to his art and applied to the king, he would metamorphose him into the exact figure of Duke Gothlois; his friend Ursin into Jordan of Tintegell, his familiar companion and counsellor; Merlin himself agreed to make the third in the adventure, by assuming the character of Bricot, a servant waiting on the duke's lady. Thus disguised, while the duke was busied in defending the castle he was in, they were to command their entrance into the other fort, in the name and person of the duke. The king was pleased with Merlin's plan, and gave immediate orders to his captains and commanders concerning the siege, while he withdrew on a pretence of other business, to place himself under the care and art

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whom he had Arthur and Anna. The fame of Merlin thus became extended far and wide, in consequence of his great magical powers; and he became the counsellor both of public and private concerns.

So multifarious are the prophecies of Merlin, which relate chiefly to the history of England, that it would be impossible to consider their separate merits without entering very much into detail, and extending this article to an uncommon length. A few passages, therefore, selected from some predictions, which evidently point at the period about the reign of Queen Elizabeth, will shew that the British prophet had a very intimate and correct prescience of the events which were regularly to take place for many centuries after his death. Speaking of the reign of Mary, sister of Elizabeth, he thus prophesies:

Then shall the masculine sceptre cease to sway,
And to a SPINSTER the whole land obey ;
Who to the papal monarchy shall restore
All that the Phoenix had seetch'd thence before.
Then shall come in the faggot and the stake,
And they of convert bodies bonefires make.
Match shall this Lioness with Cæsar's son.
From the Pontific Sea a pool shall run,
That wide shall spread its waters, and to a flood
In time shall grow, made red with martyrs' blood.
Men shall her short unprosp'rous reign deplore,
By loss at sea, and damage on the shore ;
Whose heart being dissected, you in it
May in large characters find CALICE wri.

By the Phoenix is meant King Edward, so termed by Hieronymus Cardanus, because he gave new life to the Protestant religion, and was unparalleled in his time. The fifth and sixth lines will depict the cruel persecution which took place in this reign, and the following evidently point out Queen Mary's marriage with King Philip of Spain. The eighth line is meant for Cardinal Pole, who was twice elected Pope, and whom Mary purposed to